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A study examined school personnel perspectives on barriers to the implementation of a statewide program to influence change in curriculum and instruction. Interviews were conducted with personnel from 5 schools and districts and generally positive results were reported in moving from their existing curriculum and assessment programs to the mandated state program. Interview data from teachers, principals, and curriculum coordinators demonstrated that adherence to the mandated statewide program was not without considerable challenges. School personnel reported that the implementation of the program and intended school change was made difficult by barriers related to the lack of alignment between existing and mandated instruction and performance assessment, lack of alignment between teacher practices and beliefs with those implicit in the statewide program, lack of resources to help implement change mandated by the state program, the performance assessment materials and procedures themselves, and the lack of sufficient communication from the state-related to the mandated program. Results suggest that overcoming the barriers to implementation of the statewide program requires a systematic approach that provides the resources to support change of classroom practice, helpful communication between those people involved in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment change processes, and ongoing refinement of the assessment program and the performance assessment materials and procedures. (Contains 21 references.) (Author/RS)

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Barriers to the Implementation of a Statewide Performance Program: School Personnel Perspectives

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National Reading Research Center

READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 51
Winter 1996

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Barriers to the Implementation of a Statewide Performance Program: School Personnel Perspectives

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Abstract. *This study examined school personnel perspectives on barriers to the implementation of a statewide program to influence change in curriculum and instruction. We interviewed personnel from five schools and districts that reported generally positive results in moving from their existing curriculum and assessment programs to the mandated state program. Interview data from teachers, principals, and curriculum coordinators demonstrated that adherence to the mandated statewide program was not without considerable challenges. School personnel reported that the implementation of the program and intended school change was made difficult by barriers related to the lack of alignment between existing and mandated instruction and performance assessment, lack of alignment between teacher practices and beliefs with those implicit in the statewide program, lack of resources to help implement change mandated by the state program, the performance assessment materials and procedures themselves, and the lack of sufficient communication from the state related to the mandated program. The results suggest that overcoming the barriers to implementation of the statewide program requires a systemic approach that provides the resources to support change of classroom practice, helpful communication between those people involved in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment change processes, and ongoing refinement of the assessment program and the performance assessment materials and procedures.*

Large-scale reading assessment is increasing in frequency and changing in form and purpose. There is a burgeoning use of large-scale assessments to measure student achievement and school effectiveness at state and school district levels; a survey determined that 38 states assess the reading abilities of students in at least one grade level (Afflerbach, 1990).

These large-scale assessments yield information that is used by different audiences for a variety of purposes. Taxpayers, elected officials, parents, school board members, teachers, and others regularly use the results of large-scale state assessments to determine the achievement of students, the effectiveness of reading instruction programs, and the accountability of schools and teachers. Large-scale assessment also has been used to intentionally influence the nature of schooling: what is taught and how it is taught, and what students learn.

Recent development and implementation of assessment have been influenced by a dissatisfaction with traditional forms of student assessment and the promise of more authentic and useful assessment materials and procedures (Shepard, 1991; Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994). For example, large-scale assessments of reading have often been conducted using multiple-choice tests that require students to read short passages for which they have little prior knowledge, and to choose one correct answer from among distractors. The resulting student responses to items present a severely restricted assessment of students' reading achievement. Such tests have questionable ecological validity when they lack a relation to the teaching and tasks that help readers learn to read, and to how students understand and use what they read in the classroom. Recent innovations, such as performance assessments, allow students to read complete texts (or several texts) and to construct responses to the texts they read. These constructed responses may allow students to demonstrate general comprehension of text, as well as individual response to the text. Furthermore, performance assessments embed acts of reading in contexts that encourage or require students to perform tasks using the information gained from reading.

Concurrent with the evolution of large-scale assessment is the evolution of classroom curriculum and instruction. Repeated assertions that students in the United States are not achieving to their potential (Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Williams, Reese, Campbell, Mazzeo, & Phillips, 1995) have led to the development of curriculum and teaching that encourages students to perform tasks that include the synthesis of information gathered through the reading of text, complex problem-solving tasks, and collaboration with classmates. Such teaching and learning should help students move beyond basic literacy skills to more involved reading and reading-related performances that demonstrate the value and the uses of reading in the real world.

The dual initiatives of developing better assessments and influencing instructional change have been melded in programs such as the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). In these high-stakes assessments, tasks, materials, and learning outcomes are presumed to be exemplars of what students should do, use, and learn. An underlying assumption here is that quality, large-scale assessments can be a positive influence on school achievement. However, the concerns related to large-scale assessment programs are considerable. The feasibility of large-scale, high-stakes performance assessment should be examined from both a measurement perspective (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991; Schafer, Guthrie, Almasi, & Afflerbach,

1994), and from school budgeting and scheduling perspectives (Shavelson, Baxter, & Pine, 1992). Given the concerns with the reliability and validity of performance assessments, the investment of resources of time and money must be carefully considered.

There are further concerns about possible negative impacts of large-scale, high-stakes assessment. The success of an assessment program depends on more than the psychometric rigor of the instruments and procedures used. Useful assessments are informed by a systemic perspective (Frederiksen, 1984; Smith & O'Day, 1991) that can contribute to the clear communication of the nature and intent of the assessment to those who take and use the assessment, and to the coordination of assessment efforts to efficiently yield useful information (Afflerbach, 1995). When assessment drives instruction, it may limit students' classroom experiences to materials and tasks that are congruent with the assessment (Smith, 1991). Teachers, parents, students, and principals may have quite different ideas about what "effective" instructional practice and materials are, and what teaching and assessment are most valid and appropriate for their own classrooms (Tittle, 1989). However, the top-down nature of large-scale assessments (i.e., they are mandated, developed, and overseen by states or districts) and the curricular reform they are tied to often assures that a particular definition or conceptualization of teaching and learning will prevail. This can cause considerable conflict among teachers who are convinced that they are already providing effective instruction for their students. Mandated large-scale assessments may also result in the diminished professionalism of teachers and the alienation of teachers if (1) the assessment is considered the single indicator of school and student success (Johnston, Afflerbach, & Weiss, 1993; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991), or (2) there are considerable differences between individual teachers' and states' model of students' literacy development, and how best to measure it. In sum, mandated curriculum, instruction, and assessment programs exist in social and political contexts. Each may influence the other and it is reasonable to expect that massive change may encounter barriers to that change. We planned the study reported here accordingly.

The investigation of barriers to the implementation of a large-scale performance program as reported by school personnel may help describe the appropriateness and effectiveness of ongoing and future efforts to influence school change through large-scale assessment. It may also inform ongoing and future efforts to maximize any positive influences of large-scale, high-stakes performance assessments, and contribute to the development and construction of performance assessments themselves. Finally, the examination of barriers helps describe the consequential validity of this statewide performance assessment in the broadest sense: what happens to teachers and students as a result of an assessment, or as a result of an assessment program?

The Maryland School Performance Program

This study focused on barriers to the implementation of a large-scale, statewide performance program in reading, as reported by the school personnel who administer, use,

and are influenced by the assessment. The Maryland School Performance Program was mandated by the state legislature in an effort to help all students learn and achieve in their respective schools. The Maryland School Performance Program is founded on three fundamental premises:

- all children can learn
- all children have the right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn
- all children shall have a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous content

(Maryland School Performance Program Office, 1990, p. iii)

The school performance program serves several purposes that are regularly associated with high-stakes assessment: a means of driving instructional reform, determining school quality, and proving school accountability. In addition, it includes a series of instruments that can influence instruction in a positive (from the perspective of supporters) manner and it is also a tool for measuring school accountability.

> . . .the Maryland School Performance Program has developed a comprehensive accountability system based on results and incorporating excellence and equity for each student. (Maryland State Performance Program Office, 1990; p. iii)

The school performance program is a high stakes assessment. Information from the school performance program is used by the state to decide if schools are helping students achieve particular levels of academic performance. School-level reading scores are reported as part of a school profile which includes performance on reading and math assessments, and school attendance and dropout rates. Schools whose students do not meet the state guidelines for achievement are at-risk for takeover by the state, which can be realized by the replacement of the teaching and administrative staffs of entire schools. In addition to providing accountability information about schools and school districts, results from the school performance program are eventually reported back at the school and district levels to provide feedback about how well they are teaching children. Results are not reported at the individual student level.

The reading portion of the school performance program examines student achievement in relation to the outcomes of: (1) positive attitudes toward reading; (2) construction, extension, and examination of meaning when reading for literary experience; (3) construction, extension, and examination of meaning when reading for information; (4) construction, extension, and examination of meaning when reading to perform a task; and (5) demonstrating awareness of strategic behaviors and knowledge about reading (Maryland State Performance Program Office, 1990). Tasks on the performance assessment are open-ended (i.e., there is no single predetermined correct answer), and tasks require students to engage in various literate activities including reading and responding to text in collaboration with peers, reading several texts related to one topic, and writing in response to reading. The assessment

considered in this study was fully intended to shape instruction and learning, and performance assessment tasks and materials were intended as models for instruction. In taking the performance assessment, students were asked to perform tasks that the state education department considered important to the literacy development of third- and fifth-grade students (Kapinus, Collier, & Kruglanski, 1994).

Methods

Schools and participants

Personnel from five schools in five different districts participated in this study. The schools were selected through a process that began with our establishing contact with 21 of 24 school districts in the State of Maryland. Initial requests were for school district personnel to participate in an interview to identify schools that were implementing change as a result of the school performance program. The district representatives included supervisors of reading (5), supervisors of elementary education (5), supervisors of instruction (3), supervisors of language arts (3), directors of curriculum (2), a reading specialist, a principal, and a district coordinator of testing and Chapter One. The district representatives received letters stating the purpose of the research project, and the questions that would be asked during the interview. Next, telephone interviews were held with each district representative. The interview consisted of 13 questions that were developed to help us: (1) identify schools within each district that were initiating changes and innovations in response to the school performance program; and (2) determine what kinds of changes were occurring at the county level in response to the school performance program. The 21 district representatives nominated 42 elementary schools that they believed were demonstrating positive change in relation to the school performance program, and change in the direction supported by school performance program. From this group we chose schools from 5 different districts.

Procedures

Data was gathered at each of the five schools with an 8-item, semi-structured interview, which was developed by the authors. Many of the interview questions were similar to those asked of district representatives during the "school finding" phase of our work. We piloted each question with teachers and administrators who worked in Maryland public schools, but who did not participate in the study. Information from the piloting contributed to final revision of the interview question set. The first 7 questions centered on participants' perceptions of the state goals, the impact of the school performance program on their schools and classrooms, and the manner in which change and innovation had taken (or was taking) place. The final interview question asked participants:

> What barriers (if any) did you face trying to make these changes?

This report focuses solely on the issues of barriers to school change in curriculum,

instruction, and assessment practice related to the Maryland School Performance Program. The data for this study were collected at the end of the second year of implementation of the program. More complete consideration of the impact of the program on classroom curriculum and instruction as indicated in response to other interview questions is contained in related reports (Almasi, Afflerbach, Guthrie, & Schafer, 1994; Guthrie, Schafer, Afflerbach, & Almasi, 1994; Schafer et al., 1994).

Audiotaped interviews and field notes were collected in 1-day or 2-day sessions in each school district over a 3-month period. All interviews were arranged by a building administrator prior to the visits for data collection. Interviews were conducted with building administrators (principals), curriculum specialists (curriculum coordinators, reading/language arts supervisors), and teachers (reading specialists, third- and fifth-grade teachers). Interviews were conducted in schools and district offices. Most interviews were held with individuals. However, teachers were interviewed in groups to accommodate their teaching schedules. All participants were selected because of their experiences and knowledge regarding the Maryland School Performance Program, and their diverse knowledge regarding curricular and instructional change within their particular school. Transcripts of the taped interviews were the data source.

Data Analysis

The first phase of data analysis involved two of the researchers reading all responses to the barriers question independently and identifying barriers described by the various participants in the study. Next, the researchers met to discuss their individual interpretations of the data, to develop classes of barriers as they were grounded in the participants' interview data, and to discuss specific instances of barriers (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each instance of a barrier described by study participants in the interviews was recorded on a master list, and the researchers generated a set of general categories that could explain the relationships of particular barriers, while efficiently grouping the growing list of barriers. The processes of identifying, discussing, recording, grouping, and regrouping potential barriers resulted in the increased conceptual density of each initial category. This resulted in the formation of five categories of barrier to the implementation of Maryland School Performance Program: (1) lack of alignment of current and mandated instruction and assessment; (2) lack of alignment between teacher practices and beliefs and those underlying the mandated assessment and instruction; (3) lack of resources needed to meet the demands placed on schools, teachers, and students by the new performance program; (4) the nature of the performance assessment itself, including administration and reporting of results; and (5) the quality of communication related to the nature and intent of the performance program and assessment.

Results and Discussion

This section features a representative sample of participants' responses to the request to describe barriers to the implementation of the school performance program. We have selected

interview excerpts that we feel best illustrate individual school personnel perspectives on the five types of barrier. Each interview excerpt is identified by a label that signifies the school and participant. Several aspects of our data gathering influenced our decision to describe classes of barriers and to forego the examination of barriers in the contexts of individual school's structures, programs, and communities. The interview sessions were conducted as school personnel were available, and this resulted in single interviews with some participants and group interviews with other participants (i.e., classroom teachers). A result is that the interview contexts, formats, and numbers of participants were not equivalent and it was not clear to us if individually stated practices and beliefs were generalizable to the groups of teachers we interviewed. We present participants' descriptions of particular barriers while noting that some of the interview excerpts include references to more than one barrier. For example, one excerpt describes a lack of school funds that might help teachers work to align the school curriculum with the performance program. This highlights an overlap between barriers related to resources and alignment. In such cases, we classified the participant's response in terms of the most prominent barrier mentioned.

Lack of Alignment of Current and Mandated Instruction and Assessment

The Maryland School Performance Program is intended to change and support particular teaching practices. An initial barrier for some teachers was the change from their current reading instruction to instruction aligned with the new statewide performance reading assessment. A lack of alignment between her current classroom practice and that assessment was noted by a fifth-grade teacher. This teacher had an instructional goal of helping students develop independence in performing classroom tasks, while the statewide performance assessment encouraged helping students to demonstrate achievement through collaborative work with classmates:

> They (the students) really don't like working independently. They would rather work in a group. Wouldn't most of us? Like we are doing right now where we bounce ideas off here and there, instead of just sitting here and answering questions by yourself. Yet we feel that somewhere else down the line they also need to be independent thinkers on their own. (RF.0402)

Convinced that her goal of helping students develop independence was important, the teacher had designed significant amounts of classroom instruction and had altered the classroom environment to meet this goal. Yet, she felt she was required to design collaborative tasks to best prepare her students for taking the performance assessment.

The school performance program was intended to change classroom teaching and learning, and it resulted in differences in student learning outcomes. With the changes in nature of student outcomes came the need for reporting changes in student achievement that were aligned with new curriculum. Most districts used report cards that reflected their

particular curriculum (and consensus values) to report student achievement and progress to parents, students, and other teachers. The goodness of fit of the categories and descriptions within the report card with what students learned as a result of the Maryland School Performance Program became a barrier. There was a lack of alignment between the students' learning outcomes from instruction developed as a result of the school performance program, and the means of describing the outcomes using the report card. This meant the need for the development of new report cards: an effort that demanded considerable time of teachers and supervisors, in addition to the curricular changes mandated by school performance program. A fifth-grade teacher told us:

> First grade has developed a report card for their grade level, but we're still using the original book report cards. So that could be something that they could look into . . . helping create a report card for this type of reading and writing strategy. (RT.0401)

The Maryland School Performance Program was considered an innovative assessment by some teachers and a flawed assessment by others. Regardless of participants' beliefs about the program, it was mandated by the state and it was used to measure school goodness. In effect, it required that all teachers adjust their instruction and curriculum. The lack of alignment between current classroom instruction and the instruction that prepared students to take the school performance program influenced teacher confidence. This resulted in considerable anxiety for some teachers, anxiety that itself could be a barrier. Teachers' work to align instruction occurred in a context in which teachers were under considerable scrutiny and accountability. Teachers reported that they had varied levels of confidence in teaching with new materials and new instructional procedures. A third-grade teacher told us:

> Literature-based instruction is harder than teaching from basals. It is harder. It is much easier to pick up a teacher's manual and follow. . . it's much easier . . . and we feel . . . I know I still don't feel confident . . . that you are covering everything that you're supposed to cover and doing everything that you're supposed to do. (RF.0401)

In addition, teachers were concerned about the alignment of existing classroom assessments with the new mandated curriculum, and their ability to collect diagnostic or formative assessments of student development in a school performance program-informed instructional program. A third-grade teacher reported:

> You also have a little bit of insecurity with the littler guys still going back to that question, "Where are they?" You still kind of like that security. Are they on the first grade? Are they on preprimer? I think that's why we bought so heavily into the portfolio assessments because they were a little bit more security for us because we could look and see how they were developing and how they were moving along with their level of security (M.0501)

The school performance program includes the large-scale performance assessment system that was developed outside the culture and

practices of schools and classrooms, with the intention of changing school practice. While all participants in this study understood the mandate for change, many were not sure of the details of change. Similarly, teachers were not sure who or where they might consult to determine if the changes they implemented in their classrooms were appropriate. Lack of familiarity with the specifics of change necessitated by the school performance program and lack of clarity of implications for instruction were a barrier for this reading teacher:

> Sometimes tying it all together is difficult because we were talking and we tried to pull this into here and this into here and sometimes it just doesn't quite fit there at that time. They may fit somewhere else. So our thing's been basically going through these novels to see where they would fit. Maybe next year we'll be better because we'll know if this fits better here as opposed to putting them with this unit. (M.0503)

Lack of Alignment of Mandated Instruction and Assessment with Teacher Practice and Belief

Large-scale assessment can have varied influence on teachers and their teaching. Negative effects of high-stakes assessment include the alienation that some teachers feel when the assessment reduces teachers' initiative to make classroom decisions, and a lessened sense of professionalism that occurs when teachers are required to teach what the state education department decides is important (Johnston et al., 1993; Smith, 1991). The teachers participating in this study did not cite alienation or a sense of reduced professionalism as barriers to implementing the school performance program. Still, we gathered information on the crucial nature of teachers' willful participation in the changing of their practice, as described by a reading supervisor, building principal, and a teacher. The following three excerpts describe different participants' perspectives on the degree of alignment between individual teacher's classroom practice and the practice required by the school performance program, and teachers' willingness to consider change in their practice to align with state goals and objectives.

Teachers and supervisors who had confidence in their reading instruction and reading program might resist the change mandated by the school performance program, believing that there is no need to change their instruction. Resistance also might have roots in the alienation felt by teachers who consider themselves professionals but who feel they are not treated professionally in a program with mandated (as opposed to suggested) change. A third-grade teacher told us that success in the new program and on the performance assessment might be highest with teachers who were already achieving in their classrooms. In contrast, the teacher told us that teachers determined to set their own curricular agendas might have difficulty.

> The teacher is the crucial barrier. You can do all the training you want and if the teacher has a closed mind and won't try it—you can forget it. (CW.0201)

This teacher did not report having any personal dilemmas related to teaching in terms of the

school performance program, but acknowledged the key role of the teacher to carry out the externally mandated plan.

A reading supervisor described teachers' and students' use of a writing process portfolio procedure that was directly informed by the performance assessment. The specific demands of the portfolio assessment processes and contents forced teachers toward a particular type of writing instruction which was aligned with the writing required on the performance assessment. Portfolios were used for the purpose of proving school and teacher accountability to the state program, as well as for their more familiar purpose of documenting and facilitating student growth.

> The kids work out of these folders during the writing process and this was kind of a check and balance on the teachers to make sure they were doing the whole writing process. (CC.0304)

A building principal reported special concerns with recently graduated and newly certified teachers. He saw his role as one of inculcating new teachers and creating conformity in their practice in relation to the school performance program. Alignment of teaching practice with school performance program guidelines and expectations was paramount for this principal, even if teachers had practices and beliefs that differed from those compatible with the state program

> Our new teachers are my worry. We have a few new teachers and I can't get them where I want them to be, but we're working on it. (CC.0305)

Lack of Resources

A frequent barrier to implementation of changes in curricular practices and materials was the lack of district or school resources. Participants most often cited lack of resources in terms of time and money, with time the most frequently cited barrier to implementing school changes related to the school performance program. Many of the participants in this study noted that the new assessment required substantial time commitments to perform an array of tasks. The school performance program demanded teacher responsibility (and related demands of time) for planning and monitoring instruction, changing instruction, and observing and evaluating students. The school performance program was designed to encourage changes in teaching and learning that are fully aligned with the performance assessment, but the process of change and the lack of time needed to change defined a barrier, as reported by a reading supervisor.

> Time. Not enough time. There's not enough teacher planning time, and I just don't know how to get around it. . . . I would say that that's been the biggest obstacle. . . , getting enough time to sit down and really collaborate the plans and work together. (CC.0304)

Participants reported that the school performance program resulted in changes in their lives both inside and outside of school. The interview data indicated that most teachers were willing to give the extra time demanded by the performance program to effect change. Yet, the teachers acknowledged that too heavy

a demand on their time created a considerable barrier, despite their commitment to changing their own practice and student learning. A second reading supervisor reported:

> It's a hard place to work in. We don't get out of here until 6:30 at night lots of times and when I leave there's still cars from teachers out there. I come in on Sundays sometimes. (RT.0104)

Even in school districts that provided support for implementing change (usually in the form of salary for work beyond contract hours or added inservice days), the time allotment was not always sufficient. A third-grade teacher reported:

> They [the county Board of Education] did give us inservice time, but a lot of it [the amount of work to prepare lessons] is extra nights and extra hours, truly. In these folders [their lesson plans for each trade book] we try to approach the dialog books [journals], or the trade books, through the state's stances—the global, interpretive, personal, and critical—so that when we do our comprehension activities, we are trying to cover those that are used in the assessments with the school performance program, but I don't think any of us looked at it as, "Oh, this is getting the students ready." (RF.0401)

Several teachers told us that their preferred approach to planning and implementing change at the third- and fifth-grade (the grades at which the MSPAP was administered) level was to meet regularly in collaborative work groups. These meetings allowed teachers to integrate their instruction and to share their approaches to changing instruction to align with the school performance program and the new assessment. However, some schools could not provide the time to allow teachers to do so, as reported by a fifth-grade teacher:

> We need the time to sit down together as a team and try to put it together . . . and we don't have the time. (RF.0402)

In response to the demands of the school performance program, some districts allotted funding for additional teacher work time and inservice sessions that were intended to help teachers move from their current classroom practice to that practice suggested by the school performance program. A third-grade teacher noted that the school district allocated time for inservice training to help teachers encourage students' written responses to what they read. This teacher determined that inservice training was inconsistent. This teacher's colleagues did not necessarily receive the same training.

> The county has also provided some ideas for response to writing through the ILA [Integrated Language Arts] committee. The only trouble is that the way that the inservice [is divided] up between math one year and ILA the next . . . because there are two focuses in the county, not everyone's inservice is the same amount of time or on the same topic. (CC.0401)

Closely related to investments of time were district and school financial resources. Changes in instruction required new materials and training for teachers. The state mandated and

delivered the school performance program goals and performance assessment, and the directive to align teaching and learning with the school performance program. Yet, individual districts and schools had to provide resources to effect this change. One typical resource was inservice work, but the nature and effectiveness of inservice work was influenced by school and district budgets. A reading supervisor described the different budget demands that competed with the need to help orient teachers to the new program of performance assessment and related curriculum:

> We've got the state outcomes to meet and the changing curriculum, and we have been cut back on inservice time. I mean, we used to have substitutes and at least time for teachers to go to training. And that has all been cut because of the budget. (CC.0304)

The literacy portion of the performance assessment required students to read and use their understanding of what was read to perform academic tasks. The tasks included responding in writing after gathering information from a variety of reading materials and reading to comprehend information in relation to other forms of communication. While these assessment tasks have the potential for high ecological validity (in classrooms, students may gather information to perform tasks from an array of texts, from discussions with classmates, and through observing movies and television), instruction and assessment that incorporates diverse forms of media requires specific resources. The importance of school resources required by the new school performance program and assessment was emphasized by a third-grade teacher:

> We started without a media center that was functional because they didn't fund it. (RF.0401)

Money pays for instructional materials and training related to the mandated performance program. Not all teachers were satisfied with the level of funding provided at the building or district level, and the frustration this caused was evident. A third-grade teacher reported the barriers related to lack of classroom materials and the time to develop appropriate instruction:

> The materials and the time. It all comes down to money because really they want us to make all these changes and do these neat things and for elementary teachers that's a big thing. (RF.0401)

In addition, some teachers felt the need to limit how much of a personal and professional commitment they would make to a program that was mandated by the state, but not funded by the state. A fifth-grade teacher in the same school told us:

> They say we get a lot of inservice, but there isn't a lot of inservice. We got inserviced before the school year when we're all tense about getting our classes set up. You are asked to stay after school or work on Saturdays, but there is no money to pay to work during the summer, which is the ideal time. (RF.0402)

Performance Assessment Materials and Procedures

Participants reported barriers related to the use of performance assessment materials and procedures themselves. These included the difficult nature of assessment tasks for some students, the novelty of the assessment format, tasks, and the classroom environment in which the assessment takes place, the administration of the assessment, and the scoring and reporting of the school performance program. The assessment itself may become a barrier if it is too difficult (students may become discouraged, frustrated, or embarrassed), if it requires too much time from the instructional year of the teacher and students, or if it is perceived by the teacher as unfair to particular students.

Teachers' greatest concern about the performance assessment itself was the level of difficulty of student tasks. One teacher reported her concern that the assessment placed some students in a situation in which failure was assured. A feature of the school performance program is that all students at grades 3, 5, and 8 are required to take the assessment, regardless of their reading ability. The teacher's knowledge that a particular child may not be able to perform or complete the assessment is not considered. A result is that the students who are known to be nonreaders (or readers performing well below grade level) may suffer embarrassment from a lengthy and public display of failure. This translates into a barrier when it leads to teachers' skepticism with the assessment, and teachers' beliefs that the potentially negative effects of the assessment experience are not worth the information it may yield. A fifth-grade teacher told us of an experience with a low-achieving student:

> When we're working with kids who are really low and slow . . . I mean you can tell . . . we can tell . . . "This kid's going to be a '5'" and there's nothing we can do about it . . . and there they are sitting there trying to take the test. (RT.0102)

For students, it may lead to degradation of already low self-esteem or self-confidence. Here, the teacher may feel the need to protect their students from public failure, or a testing experience that they believe could be devastating to their students. Alternatively, the above response could be interpreted as a teacher having low expectations for a particular student. In either case, there was no option for the teacher to recommend student exemption from the assessment. This may lead to teacher alienation, or student reluctance to read further.

Participants raised several concerns about the administration of the performance assessment. In particular, the testing sessions were considered too lengthy, and eventually exhausting for students and teachers. This was reported by this fifth-grade teacher:

> My major concern about the test is that I think it should be broken down more instead of just hitting them in one week. (M.0502)

In addition, the amount of class time (one week) dedicated to administering the performance assessment seemed extreme to some teachers. A reading teacher reported:

> The first day of the school performance program is fine, but it seems like when we get to the end of the cycle it's just too much. Even if they could give the test with one part earlier in the year and then give another part some other time in the year or something so that they (students) don't get it all at one point. (CW.0203)

A consistent set of concerns was voiced about the administration of the performance assessment. Some performance and collaborative tasks appeared to have been designed by persons who had little knowledge of the elementary classroom, or of the feasibility of performing particular tasks in classrooms. For example, test security procedures required that teachers did not receive any part of the assessment prior to the day of the assessment. One performance task required that students mix compounds on their desks and this created considerable confusion because teachers were not allowed to prepare classrooms before administering the test. The resulting barrier here was related to teacher faith in the assessment, and skepticism that whoever designed the assessment did not understand students or classrooms. A fifth-grade teacher reported that test security and standardization measures created major problems when students were to perform tasks that involved dirt and clay.

> I was wondering what fool made these things [particular assessment tasks] up . . . and then you're not supposed to deviate at all from the instructions. There was no instruction to cover the desks with newspaper! (RT.0102)

An additional concern was voiced over the creation of novel and unfamiliar groups of students to take the school performance program. It is performance assessment policy to divide intact classrooms of students and administer the performance assessment to groups of students from several classes. Students often are not in their regular classroom, and they may be placed with unfamiliar students. Thus, students take the assessment in an unfamiliar classroom setting. The resulting student anxiety may be a barrier to student achievement on the performance assessment, to the degree that the testing context differs from the routine of the regular classroom. A reading specialist told us:

> Another problem is the intermixing of kids in the groups, for example . . . my kids [the gifted class] are used to working with each other and they know how to work with each other in the classroom . . . . During the testing situation you have kids that come from other classrooms that are not quite as on target . . . . They're not as focused and it's like they don't know what to do (CW.0203)

Participants also had concerns with the scoring procedures used for the performance assessment. One teacher noted that student writing was confounded with reading achievement and that the score yielded by this confounded measure might not be a valid, accurate reflection of student learning or the teacher's ability. In addition, the confounding of reading and writing caused skepticism about the assessment among school personnel who were familiar with basic concepts of educational measurement. Results from an assessment that describe

children who have not learned to read (and by implication, a teacher who has not been successful teaching them) may cause considerable barriers to further implementation of the program, especially when the results have low construct validity (i.e., not clear what is contributing to a student's performance) and potentially great consequential validity (i.e., teachers and students are judged by assessment results that have high stakes). A fifth-grade teacher described poor handwriting, student anxiety, and language difficulties as possible influences on students' performance.

> I think that kids who have illegible handwriting shouldn't be lumped in with the kids who don't do . . . who can't do it [the assessment task]. . . . Let's not lump them all together because if you've got so many kids in category "5," does that mean our school is doing an awful job? [With] some of our kids, it's because they can't speak English . . . [with] some it's because they are scared. (RT.0102)

The amounts of school, classroom, and individual teacher and student time and effort that were invested in teaching to, preparing for, and administering and taking the school performance program were considerable. In contrast, the return on investment was slight and distal. State performance assessment results were not reported at the individual student level, and reporting back from the state to districts and schools took in excess of a year. A result is that the high-stakes assessment provides no information useful to the classroom and that participation in the performance assessment lacks meaningful closure for teachers and students. A fifth-grade teacher told us of her concern that the considerable time invested in preparing for and administering the school performance program yielded no useful information.

> You would think that there would be an analysis of the kinds of errors and why that student is making that kind of error. (RT.0102)

Students received no diagnostic or personally useful information about their performance, and teachers received no information that might be used to reflect on and revise or maintain their instruction. A district reading supervisor told us:

> The downside of performance assessment of course, is that we don't get responses back. The way the data is reported back to us is on a scale of 1 to 5 and various rubrics that we use to grade. If you get a 5, you figure you didn't do it right and if you got a 1, you figure you did really . . . scored well. If you came in with a 2 and 80% of them [the students] did it, you must be pretty good on those rubrics. I mean you're making a lot of guesses. (RT.0106)

Communication Related to the School Performance Program and Assessment

A final set of barriers was related to the nature and frequency of communications between the state education department that developed the assessment, and the districts and school members who had to administer, take,

and interpret the assessment. Clear communication is imperative when high-stakes assessment and instructional change initiatives are developed by a state education department and mandated for use in all schools and classrooms in the state. Communication is clearly connected to many of the barriers cited throughout this paper. For example, characteristics of the test might be better understood with clear communication, and clear communication might help the school district maximize the resources of time and money for training. Furthermore, successful communication might help school personnel better understand the nature and intent of the performance assessment, and this might help convince school personnel of the positive aspects of school performance program.

An example of the first type of communication barrier is related to contradictory messages that a district supervisor received from the state education department. The communication was unclear, and it demonstrated a lack of understanding on an administrative level that created barriers to implementation at the classroom level.

> They [the state] tells us not to use the results for instructional purposes and then they have all the elementary school principals in school this summer and started telling us, "You better think seriously about using what data we have for instructional purposes." They gave us suggestions—"Dimensions of Learning"—and how to apply [them] and more things like getting teachers to know rubrics and understand what rubric is in terms of assessment. (RT.0106)

Communication between school and home is crucial for introducing new programs. The communication educates parents about what is happening in schools and it can garner support for innovation and change. Lack of communication can create a barrier: it may result in parents working to maintain the familiar status quo in opposition to the newly mandated school performance program, or not becoming fully involved in maximizing and coordinating home and school educative efforts. A building principal told us:

> Many times it has to do with a concern for what a parent's or a group of parents' reactions might be. So then we might need to take a look at what we need to do with communicating better with parents. This way parents can better understand the changes of instruction and our instructional purposes. (RF.0405)

A state-level assessment and curriculum reform initiative cannot but benefit from related teacher initiative. Teachers shoulder much of the burden of change in a mandated high-stakes program, and the quality and speed of transition from one program to another can be enhanced by clear communication. Unfortunately, clear communication about the intent and nature of the school performance program was not apparent to some of the participants in the study. A fifth-grade teacher reported:

> We knew that we were going to use literature, but we were going to be using it under a different structure. We were going to be using it under something called the "Formula 3 Program" and then kind of

> like mysteriously as we got to know each other and as the school year began, we started to hear different language. And people were starting to say different things to us. Things we hadn't heard when we were interviewing to come here. The pieces were given to us little by little in pieces. So it has taken us up to this point to start to really see what the whole thing is supposed to look like. (RF.0402)

This fifth-grade teacher reported that she received considerable praise and encouragement from her principal for changing instruction, while doubting her own ability. This concern was compounded by the fact that when she asked district personnel for an instructional model that was based on and aligned with the statewide performance assessment, she was told that she was the model. The possible serendipity of the situation was not comforting to the teacher. The following excerpt demonstrates the barrier that was caused by lack of detailed orientation to the mandated program, and what the teacher perceived to be haphazard direction and guidance once the program was in place. It was not clear if the state, district, or both should have been working to provide teachers with models of what is meant by good practice.

> There is no unit or model of unit development. It's "Hey, don't worry about it. Take risks. The kids will do great because you're great." I, at various meetings with the folks who are telling us to take risks and don't worry have said, "Give me some help. Show me how to do it." I am wonderful, but if you say it can be done, then show me how. What does it look like? The response is that we are the model and that this school is the model and that this is how it should look. It is pretty scary when they say we are the model at this school. It is flattering, but it is scary because we feel like we need more guidance, and the people we are looking to for guidance are looking to us for guidance. (RF.0402)

The importance of communication in facilitating the change needed to implement the school performance program was a thread that ran through many participants' comments and responses to our question about barriers. As a follow-up, we contacted state education personnel to check on the availability of information that administrators, teachers, and students might use to learn more about the assessment program. We were told that the state had no standardized method for disseminating information to teachers about the purpose or goals of the school performance program. There was no formal documentation intended to familiarize teachers with the performance assessment, or to provide detailed explanations of performance assessment ways and means. We found that the state did send annotated scoring guides and sample tasks and student responses to each district. We also found that a booklet, "Teacher to teacher talk" (containing actual quotes from teachers about the school performance program) was sent to districts. It was expected that the booklet would reach teachers, but there was no suggested or mandated routine or program of dissemination. None of the teacher participants reported familiarity with the booklet or its contents.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that the successful implementation of a school performance program devised to change curriculum and instruction and assessment requires more than the development of assessment materials and procedures. It requires attention to (and the involvement of) the people who administer, take, and use assessments. Despite the fact that participants worked in schools that were perceived by district representatives as successful in their implementation of MSPAP related curriculum and instruction, the participants cited five general classes of barrier. It may be the case that barriers are more pronounced and more numerous in schools that are not successful in meeting the changes demanded by MSPAP. There also may be additional barriers that were not cited by the people we worked with.

A first barrier was the *lack of alignment of current classroom practice in instruction and assessment with the mandated performance program*. This is not surprising, given that the school performance program was intended to change school practice—in some cases to change it drastically. The participants in this study made clear the fact that change takes time, and change as massive as redesigning curriculum in accordance with a performance program requires considerable efforts and expenditures. School personnel reported examples of lack of alignments that required attention to the planning and carrying out of instruction, teachers' interactions with students, and roles and interactions of teachers and administrators.

A second barrier was the *lack of alignment in the beliefs and values that underlie teachers' instruction and assessment*. We did not encounter frequent reports of teacher resistance to change as a barrier. However, teacher supervisors cited teacher resistance as a potential barrier. We note again that the district and school selection procedures in this study produced a sample of schools in which the implementation of change was going well, according to school administrators. None of the schools appeared to have personnel strongly opposed to the change encouraged by the state program. We are not sure that this would have been the case in schools in which lack of alignment between the performance program and teacher belief and practice was pronounced.

Insufficient resources for meeting the demands of the performance program was a third barrier cited by many participants. Money (in the form of financing and supporting teacher inservice work sessions, instructional innovation, and teacher collaborative work groups) appears to hold considerable promise for making efficient the evolution of instruction and learning tied to a mandated performance program and assessment. It is probable that the availability of time and money will continue as a central factor in programmatic change related to performance programs.

A fourth barrier to the implementation of the performance program was the *performance assessment materials and procedures* themselves. The performance assessment included test security measures that prevented teachers from preparing adequately for the administration of the assessment. In addition, assessment policy required that all students take the

assessment, whether or not there was clear indication that the student could succeed. Teachers reported concern that students' public failure might compromise gains in achievement attributable to the performance program. The assessment routine also required that students be mixed with unfamiliar students and take the assessment in unfamiliar surroundings, and school personnel saw this as a potential barrier because of the heightened anxiety it might cause in students. Other barriers related to the assessment itself were the timeliness of reporting of school performance program results, and the lack of usefulness of the information that the assessment yielded.

The barriers related to communication were considerable, especially with regard to the *connections between the performance assessment and classroom curriculum and instruction*. Important information about performance program details was to "trickle down" (as worded by a state education official central to the school performance program) from the state education department to school districts to schools to teachers in classrooms. Yet there were indications that much important information was not getting to the classroom teachers who sought it and required it. School personnel were placed in the position of having to use the performance assessment without a clear understanding of its purpose and nature. In addition, participants cited instances in which contradictory and incomplete information was communicated to districts and teachers. Given the intended consequences of the school performance program, the development of a communication system that carries clear and pertinent information to all those who have a stake in the assessment should be a priority. Otherwise, curricular and assessment practice and change may be based on a chain of inferences that is tenuous and inaccurate.

The variety of barriers confronted by school personnel and students demonstrates that the relative ease of mandating large-scale systemic change is in sharp contrast to the process of realizing that change. In this study, the mandate was strong and the stakes were high, but the means for moving districts, schools, classrooms, teachers, and students toward academic achievement and performance assessment goals were not always apparent or present. One interpretation of this situation is that the state (having mandated a generic type of change) encourages local control of the details of change. We did not detect a communication system that could support such an arrangement. We are concerned with the number of participants who reported difficulty in understanding important aspects of the rationale and nature of the school performance program.

The Maryland School Performance Program is intended to drive innovation and change in curriculum and assessment. The successful joining of the initiatives and goals is accompanied by barriers that may undermine the intended effects of statewide mandates, and that may prevent schools, teachers, and students from benefiting from these changes. The driver of change in the Maryland School Performance program is performance assessment, considered the key to curricular reform when connected with effective instruction and learning. In addition, the mandated performance assessments are considered central to

efforts that help students learn and meet existing and evolving educational standards. Recently, educators, politicians, and researchers have noted the importance of assuring school delivery standards so that children from different circumstances may have equivalent opportunities to learn and meet educational standards. We believe the results of this study signal at least one area that needs similar attention: *there should be standards for mandating school change, and for developing and using large-scale performance assessment*. These standards will help anticipate barriers to the implementation of programs intended to change instruction, and the standards may assure that issues of curricular alignment, school resources, communication, involvement, and professionalism of all people involved in the effort are given a priori and ongoing attention.

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